



THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
NEW YORK, NY 10007

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**CONTACT:** [pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov](mailto:pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov), (212) 788-2958

**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS AT THE  
PRESCHOOL NATION SUMMIT**

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Thank you, everyone. I am thrilled to be here with so many people who care deeply about early childhood education, and it's affirming and energizing to see folks from all over the country who consider this one of the most important things we can all do for our nation, and for the future of our nation – so I just want to thank you for being here. It means a lot to us in New York City that you gathered here. It gives us encouragement on the path we're on, but most importantly, it's –

[Microphone feedback]

– ooh, lots of sound – most importantly, it's so important for everyone to see each other's efforts, to be inspired by each other, to work to figure out together all the great things we can do ahead. So, I'm pumped up to see all of you. Could we give each other a round of applause?

[Applause]

And I have to tell you, Dr. Celia Ayala is an extraordinary leader in this movement, to really change the way we educate in this country. And some people deserve the title "visionary," and she's one of them. Because, some years ago – I often say, it was hard enough to get people to talk about the importance of education, to get that on the front pages, to actually look at what proper education meant in terms of societal fairness, in terms of economic destiny – that alone was an achievement when we started having a more serious conversation about the role of education. But then, trying to get it to deepen, to talk about the importance of pre-k and Head Start and high-quality teaching childcare, and all of the other elements – that was even a higher goal, and a tougher task, because a lot of those areas were considered secondary, somehow, in our discussions, in terms of public discourse. Somehow, the things that were most elemental, the building of the foundation – as someone said to me, a few – months back, as we got deep into this pre-k effort, someone said – the way we should talk about this, is think about when you build a house. When you build a house the most important thing is laying a strong foundation. Maybe we can get this across to a lot of people who don't understand it, in the first instance, and don't feel as much – by saying it that way: if you want to build a strong house, you've got to build a strong foundation first.

You think about this effort that all of us have been engaged in, and we think about the path that had to be travelled to bring it to the fore. Celia's one of the people who, long ago, made it her commitment and helped to change the dialogue, and change the debate, and that is a precious contribution to what we're doing in this city, and what we're doing in this country today. Let's give Celia a round of applause and thank her.

And LAUP – first of all, I love the title, it's positive, it's energetic, it says it all – a really inspiring organization. You've reached almost 100,000 young people already, and more to come. You're putting into action these ideas, and you have for years now, and it's something to be very, very proud. And the whole idea of then taking that local achievement and making it national in scope, the whole idea of calling it "Preschool Nation," having a summit where we literally say, this is something we have to devote ourselves to universally. You know, I often talk with some – what's the word I'm looking for – a little sarcasm, about the fact that we – for years and years in this city, and I know there's been parallel realities in other places – we've used phrases like "universal pre-k," when in fact it wasn't reaching a huge number of kids who needed it. It wasn't reaching them for a long enough portion of each day. The idea of saying, you know, it's not enough that some kids get pre-k, or some kids get preschool opportunities, or some kids get them for a small part of the day, but we're actually – the goal here is to reach every child, and to reach them with a full enough program that it will have a transcendent impact on their lives. That's what I think is so powerful about saying, we're going to have a national meeting and call it "Preschool Nation," saying this is actually a mandate for all of us, to reach children consistently and pervasively.

I want to say, as in so many endeavors, there's a lot of people who have contributed to getting things to this point. I want to express my personal appreciation to Dick Robinson and everyone at Scholastic, who do amazing work to begin with. I remember, as a young child, benefitting from the work of Scholastic. My children have as well. But Scholastic has built upon that extraordinary heritage. It is now such an important voice for real investment, and real focus, in education, and we're so proud they're here in New York. Let's give everyone at Scholastic a round of applause.

[Applause]

I want to thank all the folks who are participating in the program today, all the panelist, all the speakers, who are being a part of this. I especially want to thank our chancellor, my chancellor, Carmen Fariña, who is truly – as I heard said earlier – an inspired choice for chancellor. Well, I agree. She's an inspired choice for chancellor. She – some things about Carmen – I think she's here in the audience, so I'll embarrass her in front of her – that are so striking: the first New York City public school teacher, in a generation, to rise up to the rank of Chancellor. That alone is extraordinary.

[Applause]

And you can tell Carmen's passion for education, and her capacity, and her ability – just infectious ability, to convince other people that there's not only a lot we have to do, but we can do. That's leadership. I often like to remind people that the word leadership starts with the idea of leading, showing people a pathway, showing them a direction. Carmen has done that with incredible effectiveness, but she's brought, with passion and real engagement, she's brought the

whole educational world along with her. Teachers know she's a kindred soul. Principals know she's a kindred soul, since she was a great principal as well.

But the other thing that Carmen believes, and I believe – and I'm a public school parent myself – and amazingly, the first mayor of this city to have a child in public school while serving as mayor, in the history of this city.

[Applause]

As a parent, I feel the parents are inherently part of the solution. Parents are the first and last teachers of our children. Carmen knows this so well, in everything she does, finding greater ways to engage our parents, make them true strategic partners – and by the way, nowhere is that more possible than when it comes to pre-k and preschool – when parents are most sensitive, most looking for an opportunity to support their kids, and to understand how to be partners with educators. So, I want to thank Carmen for all she's done, and I especially want to thank her for that point – showing us that we have an opportunity as we build this capacity, as we reach more and more children, to also bring parents more deeply into the equation. They're the ultimate strategic partners here. We have to think of them that way, we have to respect them that way, and we have to work incessantly to engage them.

The work we're doing here is only possible because we have great leadership at the DOE, and we have a lot of support – a lot of support here in this city and a lot of support in the state. You can't achieve something on the scale we are trying to do in isolation. You need to build a broader coalition. We've had tremendous support in our City Council – our Speaker of the City Council, Melissa Mark Viverito's been a great champion of these efforts for pre-K. And also, one of the really dynamic progressive leaders in the City Council, Ydanis Rodriguez, who I think is with us today, has been a great supporter. Let's give him a round of applause.

[Applause]

So, let me just say a few things here. To be here with you at the first Preschool Nation Summit, gives me a sense of moment, it gives me a sense of – we're launching something that has a very big effect. It's going to reach very far. And it's an issue whose time has come, I'm absolutely convinced of that. You know, over two years ago, I put forward the proposal for full day pre-k for every child in New York City. And, at the time, you would not be surprised that there were very many many doubting Thomases. I remember the first conversation I had with the press corps on this issue – there was a bemused tone in some of the questions. As surely, this was an impossibility. What a charming notion but surely impossible. And change happens only when you venture out a big idea and relentlessly pursue it. That's what we've done here and that's what we intend to do to make this a full reality. Well, this summit speaks to what we have to do nationally. This summit is a declaration that we have to get on a bigger path and stay on that path. And that's what makes it so exciting and the mix of people in the room – with policy makers and educators and philanthropists and so many people who can make this a reality. And the fact that LAUP has achieved so much in taking this model and showing to the world, trying to inspire all of us to go farther – I think that's noble. I think the whole notion in education, when you come upon something that works – spread it. Share it. Engage others. That's what this summit is about.

We have history on our side, in many ways. We have history on our side because more than in any other point in human history education determines economic destiny. That's just a fact. We can see it. It's so visible to the people of this city and this country. Things have changed profoundly in our society, in our workplaces, in our use of technology. Today, economic stability and economic strength derives from the level of education you have more than ever. Maybe even 30 or 40 years ago, we couldn't have said it. 30 or 40 years ago, someone could have come out of high school and there was an ample supply of good-paying jobs that only required a high school degree, or even less. But today, economic destiny is determined by education. That calls for a whole different approach and that's one reason why preschool and pre-K are more pertinent than ever because of what they allow to happen thereafter. Well, that's one reason things are on our side. I think another reason that things are on our side is that the jury's really come back on the question of early childhood education. It's very interesting. I have now pursued this intensely for a few years. I've almost never heard an opponent or a doubting journalist or an expert say, 'You're wrong about the founding fundamental argument here. You're wrong that early childhood education has this huge multiplier effect. You're wrong that it can improve performance in the years that are after and has a direct correlation to so many outcomes even in adulthood.' Nobody questions the fundamental values. They may question how far we can reach, they may question the specific quality of a curriculum, how many teachers should be in the classroom - there's lots of specifics you can argue - but we've already won the debate on whether this is something necessary. And there's such an ample body of evidence, and we have to promote that more thoroughly. Those two pieces, the fact that the jury's back proving what early childhood achieves, and that society has changed demanding and requiring early childhood education more than ever before, those are the pillars upon which we build this movement and spread it. And those are ideas I think are quite universal.

Now, I'm focused right now on our four-year-olds, kids of pre-K age. I want to make sure every single one has full day, high quality pre-K. I know we have a lot to do to reach two-year-olds and three-year-olds as well. And by the way I have personal expertise in this area. My wife and I, when our daughter Chiara was born, both of us were working, both of us had demanding jobs. We tried to figure out what to do as her new parents. I remember very vividly bringing Chiara home from the hospital. The hospital in Brooklyn that she was born in had one requirement and one requirement only: they wanted to know if we had a car seat. They didn't say, 'How good are you at parenting, do you know about schools, do you know about reading to your child?' They just wanted to know we had a car seat. We did have a car seat. We brought Chiara home and we literally were afraid to take her out of the car seat -

[Laughter]

Because we didn't know what's next. So we brought her home, she's in the car seat, she's safe and sound, and Chirlane and I both step back and looked. And we had that classic moment, we looked at each other, we said, 'What do we do now?'

And we had to find our way like so many parents do. So we both had very demanding jobs, long hours, we wanted to make sure our daughter had a great start. It happened that in our neighborhood in Brooklyn there was a childcare collective, it was a wonderful place that parents were a part of and took kids early in their lives and helped them get a great start. Chiara went in there at 21 months, and she thrived.

Our son Dante also was, even before pre-K, was in quality teaching childcare. Dante, interestingly enough, quickly early on, some of the experts that were in those schools said he has a little bit of an issue with speech, and they helped him get some of the support he needed. And it was interesting, at the time you would have said, ‘Well this kid doesn’t talk a lot. Wonder what’s going to happen going forward.’ Well, you’ve guessed it. Dante is a leading member of the Brooklyn Tech High School debate team now.

[Applause]

Which leads to the famous rejoinder of, ‘Wish we could shut him up sometimes’.

[Laughter]

Time and time again, we’ve seen in our own lives the kids who get attention early on are able to do extraordinary things. The kids who have some challenges, they can be addressed so much better early on. And so that very personally led me to my focus on pre-K. And I thought, here’s the thing we can do, that’s a huge difference-maker, we know how to do it. It’s a matter of will, it’s a matter of resources, it’s a matter of belief that we’re going to get this done. And so we went up to our state capital. It was not always an easy fight. We had to build support, we had to build a coalition, we had to convince folks in Albany that this was absolutely essential. And we never considered anything short of a fast path to full-day pre-K for all. We didn’t have – a lot of times journalists said to me, ‘What’s your plan B? Tell us about your plan B.’ And I said, it’s not that we can’t conceive of possibly losing this battle. It’s that we don’t accept the notion that there should be a plan B. There’s only plan A: full-day pre-K for all.

[Applause]

And so we looked at the numbers today in New York City, where we just finished a school year with the old alignment on pre-K, about 20,000 kids in full-day pre-K. In September, largely due to the heroic efforts of Carmen Fariña and her team, and our deputy mayor Richard Buery and so many others, we’re going to have over 50,000 kids in full-day pre-K in this city. A lot of extraordinary leaders helped us on a task force that built out the curriculum and the approach, and I think some of them many be with us, including the amazing Jennifer Jones Austin, who was also co-Chair of my transition; Nancy Kolben, of the Center for Children’s Initiatives and Elba Montalvo, of the Committee for Hispanic Children and Families. They were part of a group that worked day and night to help us develop the plan. And now we’re putting the plan into action, and we are not turning back. Over 50,000, starting one month from today, when school opens. And that’s the beginning, because we believe the actual demand is closer to 70,000 a year. So the following school year, we will go above 70,000 full-day, high-quality pre-K seats in this city.

[Applause]

Again, I know I’m preaching to the converted, but let me offer two examples, because I think they put a point on why this matters so much. There’s a woman named Devan Gorman, to a four year old daughter named Jayla. And she sent her to pre-K, the Laurelton Academy in Queens last year. And Devan, like so many parents, was concerned: could Jayla get the foundation she needed? What was she getting from pre-K? Was she ready for it, what would it mean thereafter?

Well, Devan's a very involved parent, a teacher herself, in fact. And what she found was that Jayla learned alphabet and vocabulary and math skills, got a strong foundation. And even more important, got the socialization, got the confidence, got the ability to participate and feel comfortable in a classroom, so that when she would go off to Kindergarten it was already a given that she was going to be successful, that she knew how to be a part of it. I had another experience in Queens a few months back, promoting our initiative. Carmen was there with me, I think, we went to a classroom and I was asked to read to a pre-K class, and I am expert in the text that was provided for me, the very erudite text, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. I had read it many times, I knew it well, I knew the ending already. So I read this book, and kids are raising their hands all through it, they're throwing out ideas, they're saying what the colors are, they're saying what the numbers are. And at the very end, there was one child in the back who really hadn't said much, didn't seem overly engaged. So I finished reading, and he puts up his hand, and he's very very concerned, he wants to say something. And he says, I have a word he wants to say, and I say, what's your word? And he says, 'Metamorphosis'. He's a four-year old! And he just like, peeled it off, he's like, 'Metamorphosis'. And it was one of those moments, and a lot of the press corps were there, and even they were taken aback, and were like, 'If this is what pre-K does, we want a lot more pre-K.'

So we see it over and over again – the energy, the focus it brings to kids. I sat with a group of kindergarten and first grade teachers at that same school and I said, 'What can you tell me about the impact that pre-K has?' And they said, literally, like, in the first hour of the school year, they can tell you which kids went to pre-K and which kids didn't, because they're so much more engaged – those who did are so much more engaged, so much more comfortable. The foundational skills are there and they're ready to go and they're on grade-level and they're advancing. That's what we need for every child. That should be the goal for every child. And it's also so important if we're going to address the inequalities that we face – in many ways more than ever in our society – pre-K is one of the answers. It's one of the answers.

This is a city that has a huge inequality crisis. 46 percent of our people are at or near the poverty level right now. We have to address that and there's many many pieces – in terms of employment, affordable housing, many pieces – but if you think about it, pre-K is a double investment. In the here and now, it's lightening the burden on so many hard-working parents. If they know they're going to have full-day pre-K guaranteed to them, it takes, in many cases, an expense out of their life, it gives them a schedule – a certainty in their schedule. It gives them a sense that their child is moving forward. That's a huge step in the here and now, but it's also a guarantee of the future possibilities of that child. If we're going to address inequality, we have a lot to do here and now. We also have to lay a very different foundation for the future. So pre-K manages to do both of those things at once.

So, I know I'm preaching to the converted. I won't take up more of your time. I just want to say, you see now the outline of a truly national movement. I hope what we're doing in New York City contributes greatly to it. But what LAUP's been doing has built a foundation already. What's happening in San Antonio and what's happening in Oklahoma, what's happening in Denver – you see all over the country people finding their way, all different paths, all variations on a theme, but finding their way to major investments in early childhood education.

We've got to really create one standard. We've got to say that full-day high quality pre-K is going to be the national standard. We've got to drive toward it. We've got the examples. We've

got the success stories. We've got the movement starting to happen. I hope that this summit will be remembered as another moment along the way, where things started to turn, where the consensus became deeper, where action became something that people really decided to pursue relentlessly – and it has to be relentless. LAUP wouldn't have gotten as far as it got without relentlessness. We wouldn't have been able to get the full-day pre-K in this city without relentlessness. This is a movement that can't turn back.

I'll just finish with a quote that always helps me think about issues like this, because sometimes it can feel like a difficult struggle, sometimes it can feel like an uphill battle, or maybe we just can't get as far as we want to get – we've got to remember how change happens. And I'm always struck by the quote by the famed anthropologist Margaret Mead – she said, 'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.' For that reason I'm honored to be with you today. Thank you so much.

[Applause]

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